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ABSTRACT

Patterns of school-to-work transition in Ireland and Scotland in 1979-1991 were compared by using data from the annual Irish and biennial Scottish school leavers surveys. Unemployment among school leavers in both countries increased rapidly over the study period. A comparison of both respondent groups' educational experiences, educational attainment, labor market history, training, and course enrollments established that, although both countries saw an increase in participation in postcompulsory education, participation rates remained higher in Ireland than in Scotland. Throughout the study period, greater proportions of Scottish school leavers departed from the junior level of education. Unemployment rates were higher in Ireland than in Scotland. Individuals who left school at the end of their junior cycle were more likely to be unemployed. In Scotland, approximately half of all junior leavers entered youth training programs or apprenticeships. In Ireland, only a small proportion of junior leavers entered some form of training. The study demonstrated that the Irish response to unemployment of allowing full-time education to expand was not always attractive to poorly qualified young people. On the other hand, the Scottish response of increased provision of training prevented immediate unemployment for poorly qualified young people and provided an alternative to continuing in school. (MN)

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School-to-Work Transitions in Ireland and Scotland, 1979-1991

by Emer Smyth and Paula Surridge

No. 10, April 1997

The early 1980's saw an unprecedented rise in unemployment among young people in both Scotland and Ireland. This *Briefing* compares school-to-work transitions in Scotland and Ireland between 1979 and 1991 using data from the series of school leavers' surveys in the two countries. The comparison between Scotland and Ireland is of particular interest since the countries share a similar structure of compulsory education but young people's participation in post-compulsory education and their post-school destinations differ in each country. The two countries also responded very differently to the rise in youth unemployment.

- **Both** countries saw an increase in participation in post-compulsory education over the period 1979-1991. However, participation rates remained higher in Ireland than in Scotland. Throughout the period, a greater proportion of Scottish school leavers left from a "junior" level of education.
- **Unemployment** among school leavers rose rapidly in both countries over the period. This was most marked among those leaving school from a "junior" stage. Unemployment among all leavers was higher in Ireland than in Scotland but the difference was most apparent among "junior" leavers.
- **In** Scotland about a half of "junior" leavers entered youth training schemes or apprenticeships. Such schemes had a minor role in Ireland and only a small proportion of "junior" leavers went into some form of training scheme.
- **The** comparison shows how the different responses in each country to rising unemployment varied in their impact on school leavers. The Irish response of allowing full-time education to expand was not always attractive to poorly qualified young people. The Scottish response of increased provision of training schemes prevented immediate unemployment for poorly qualified young people and provided an alternative to continuing in school.
- A key question is whether the **different routes taken by Irish** and Scottish leavers resulted in longer term differences in their labour **market experience**.

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Background

This *Briefing* compares the pattern of school-to-work transitions in Ireland and Scotland between 1979 and 1991. During this period both countries witnessed an unprecedented rise in youth unemployment. The comparison of Scotland and Ireland is of particular interest because while the two countries share a similar structure of compulsory education, they responded very differently to the rise in youth unemployment. In Scotland, youth training schemes were introduced to cope with the rising numbers of unemployed young people. In Ireland, there were few such schemes and full-time education was allowed to expand to accommodate some of the displaced young people. For a detailed comparison of the education, training and labour market structures in the two countries see Smyth and Surridge (1995).

About the study

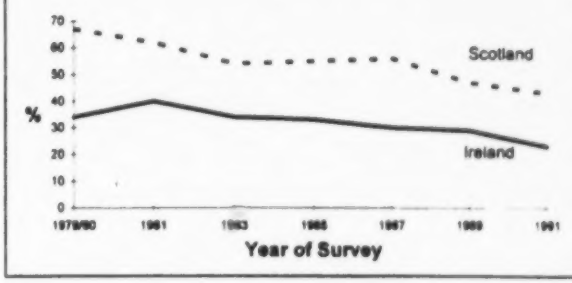
The comparison uses data from surveys of school leavers in the two countries. An annual survey of school leavers has been carried out in Ireland since 1980. The survey involves personal interviews with those who had left second-level education in the previous academic year. The Scottish school leavers survey is a postal survey which has been carried out biennially since 1977. Each survey is timed to contact young people around nine months after the session in which they left school. Both surveys are multi-purpose covering educational experiences, attainment, labour market history, training, course enrolments and family background.

The Irish and Scottish surveys were used to produce a common set of variables for every second year between 1981 and 1991. It was also considered crucial to take account of changes in unemployment levels between 1979 and 1981. The lack of a school leavers survey in Ireland before 1980, led us to take 1979 in Scotland and 1980 in Ireland as comparable "pre-recession" base-lines. A further limitation of the data is information on qualifications obtained is not available in Ireland before 1985. We therefore use stage of leaving school as a proxy for qualifications. For these purposes "junior" leavers are defined as those who left school at the end of junior cycle in Ireland and at the end of S4 or winter of S5 in Scotland.

Patterns of school leaving

Figure 1 shows the trends in stage of leaving school in the two countries. Throughout the period a greater proportion of school leavers in Scotland left from a junior stage. In 1979/80, only one third of Irish school leavers left school from a junior stage compared with two-thirds of Scottish school leavers. However, in both countries the proportion of leavers from a junior stage has declined over the period.

Figure 1: Proportion of school leavers leaving from a "junior" stage, 1979-1991

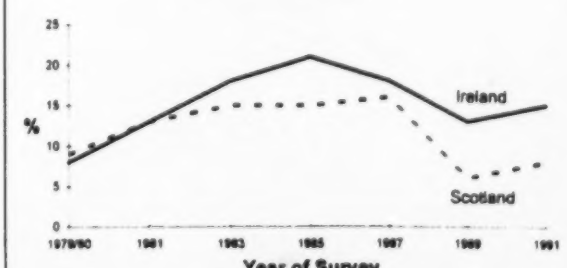


Ireland already had higher rates of post-compulsory participation prior to the rise in youth unemployment in the early 1980s.

Post-school destinations

Figure 2 shows the proportion of school leavers in the two countries who were unemployed at the time of the surveys. At first glance it suggests that the labour market prospects for young people in Scotland improved relative to those in Ireland over the period. Unemployment followed a similar cycle in the two countries, but the Irish rate overtook the Scottish rate in 1983 and has since remained above the Scottish rate.

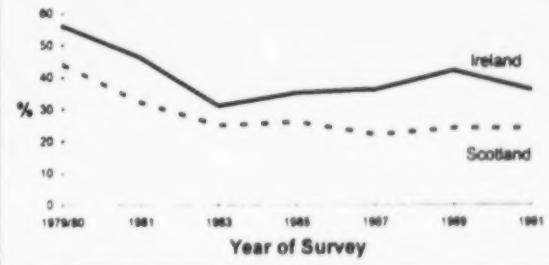
Figure 2: Proportion of school leavers unemployed, 1979-1991



However, looking only at unemployment gives a somewhat misleading picture of the two systems. If we instead look at the proportion of school leavers in full-time employment (Figure 3) we see that the Irish

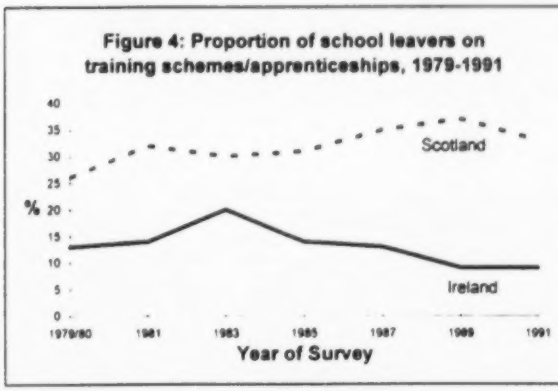
system appears to have fared better. Again we see that both countries follow the same general trend but the proportion of school leavers in full-time employment in Ireland was consistently higher than that in Scotland.

Figure 3: Proportion of school leavers in a full-time job, 1979-1991



The apparent contradiction between Figures 2 and 3 can be explained by the proportion of school leavers entering training schemes or apprenticeships (shown in Figure 4). A much higher proportion of school leavers in Scotland went on to some type of youth training scheme, reaching a peak of 37% of school leavers in 1989. In Ireland, few such schemes existed and this is reflected in the lower proportions of school leavers in this group.

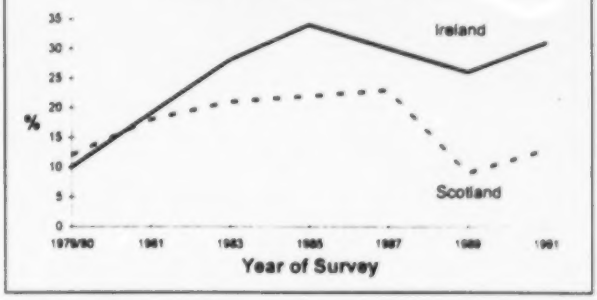
Figure 4: Proportion of school leavers on training schemes/apprenticeships, 1979-1991



The differences shown in Figures 2, 3 and 4 are even more acute if we consider the position of those who left school from a junior stage, that is those most likely to be at risk of unemployment. Figure 5 shows the proportion of leavers from a junior stage unemployed at the time of the surveys. Here we see that the gap between the two countries is much greater. A similar pattern is evident for the proportion of junior leavers in full-time employment.

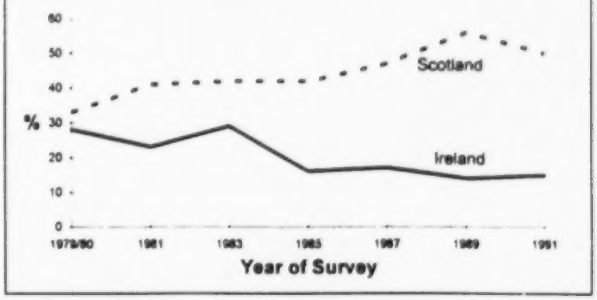
The reason for this is again the participation on youth training schemes (Figure 6). In Scotland almost half of junior leavers were on some form of training scheme by 1991. In Ireland this was just 15%.

Figure 5: Proportion of junior leavers unemployed, 1979-1991



The different participation rates in training schemes means it is difficult to make a direct comparison of labour market statuses between the two countries. There is some evidence of employers in Scotland taking on young people through training schemes rather than directly as employees. However, there is little doubt that a significant proportion of those on schemes would otherwise have been unemployed.

Figure 6: Proportion of junior leavers on training schemes, 1979-1991



Gender differences

In both countries, young women were more likely to have followed the general full-time education route than were young men; they were more likely to be in training schemes or apprenticeships. But comparing Ireland and Scotland, a higher proportion of young women participated in general full-time education in Ireland than in Scotland, and young men in Ireland were less likely than their counterparts in Scotland to be involved in training schemes or apprenticeships.

Conclusions

Ireland and Scotland have a number of similarities in their education and training systems but markedly different outcomes in terms of the labour market position of school leavers. Initial differences between school leavers in each country were exacerbated by differences in institutional responses to growing unemployment levels among young people over the 1980s. The different responses to rising unemployment in the two countries impacted particularly strongly on those who left school at a junior stage. This is hardly surprising as this is the group most at risk of unemployment. However, it also suggests that the option adopted in Ireland of encouraging delayed exit from school did not appeal to those with few qualifications. The Scottish solution of youth training schemes prevented immediate unemployment amongst this group.

Each system had different outcomes for different groups, for example, those who undertook no post-compulsory education or training. In Ireland, the "problem" group in this respect was young men while in Scotland, young females fell disproportionately into this category.

A key question is whether the different routes taken by Irish and Scottish leavers resulted in longer term differences in their labour market experience. The Scottish solution of youth training schemes prevented immediate unemployment among those with few qualifications but did this group continue to experience lower unemployment than their Irish counterparts? Further research on young people's labour market position at a later stage is needed to be able to assess the longer-term effects.

Further information

For more information, contact Paula Surridge at the Department of Sociology, University of Aberdeen (Tel: 01224 272766, Email p.surridge@abdn.ac.uk). The views expressed in this *Briefing* are those of the authors.

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Related publications

Smyth, E. and Surridge, P. (1995) *A comparative analysis of school to work transition patterns in Ireland and Scotland, 1979-1991*, Working paper, European Science Foundation, Network on Transitions in Youth.

Smyth, E. and Surridge, P. (1996) School to work transitions in Ireland and Scotland, 1979-1991, *Labour Market Review*, Volume 6 No 1, Foras Aiseanna Saothair: Dublin.

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